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TEXAS RANGERS

A THRILLER
PUBLICATION

FEATURING
BAYOU GUNS

A Jim Hatfield Novel
By JACKSON COLE

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LONG SAM CARRIES THE MAIL by LEE BON

TEXAS RANGERS

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

DECEMBER, 1949

COMPLETE NOVEL

Bayou Guns



By Jackson Cole

Deep into the swamplands and tortuous labyrinths of the Texas Gulf Coast rides Jim Hatfield as he fights to liberate victims of tyranny! Follow a battling Ranger as he combats pirate and outlaw! 11

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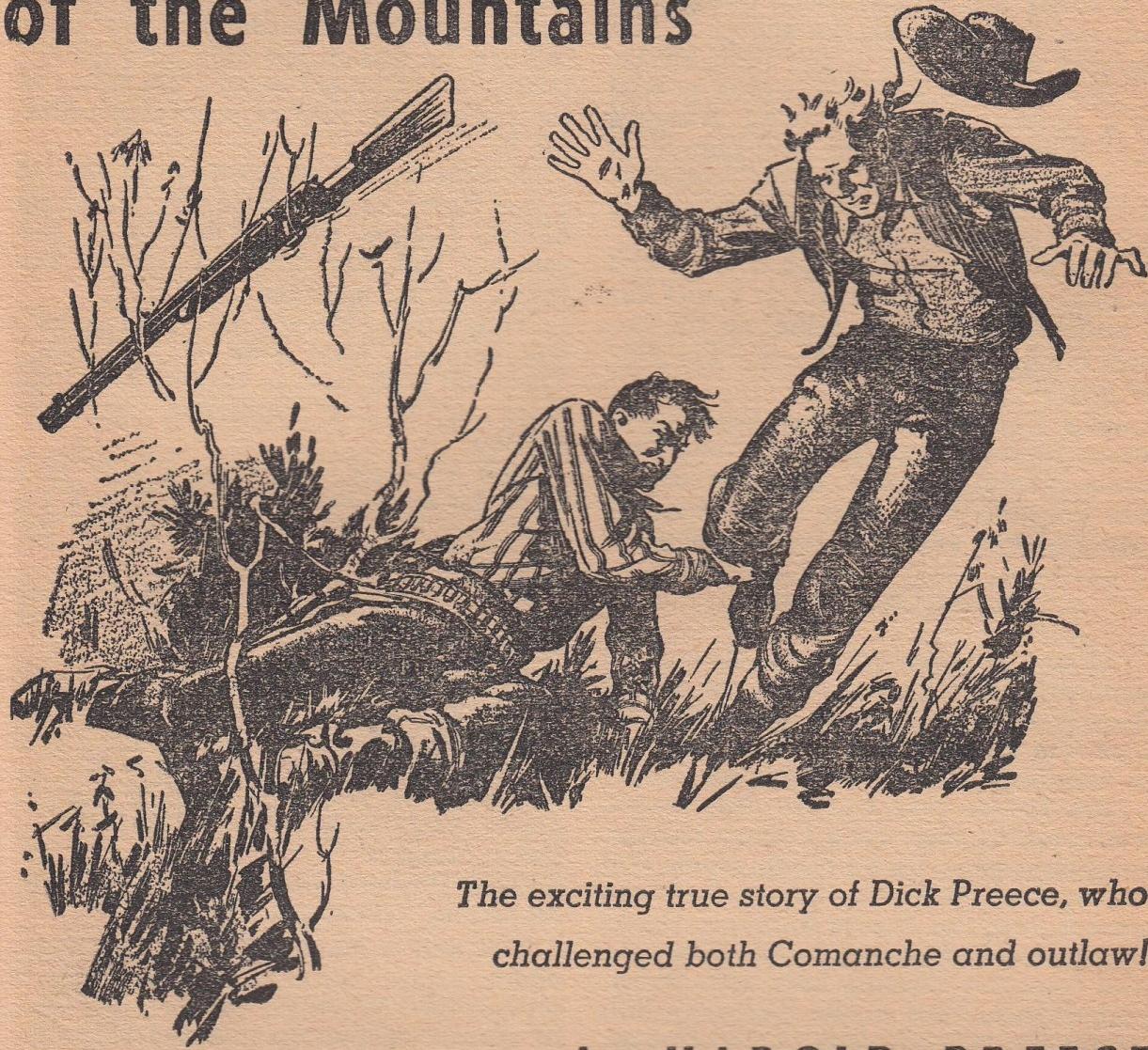
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EAGLE of the Mountains



*The exciting true story of Dick Preece, who
challenged both Comanche and outlaw!*

The outlaw found his foot caught in
a grip of iron

by HAROLD PREECE

THE homesteader had been dead three days when the silent men in the big hats pulled him from the muddy waters of Jim Ned Creek. His arms and legs had been bound with heavy iron wire; a heavy iron weight had been hung around his neck to make him sink. But still his eyes stared in grim accusation. And the Ranger company knew

those eyes were accusing the cut-throat pack they hunted.

Six times, that hot month of August, 1858, the Rangers had pulled dead settlers out of creeks and rivers here in the west Texas hills. Six times, Brick Banks' band of killers, which hated civilization and was determined to stamp it out in Texas, had given the slip to the lawmen.

FAMOUS TEXAS RANGERS

TEXAS RANGERS

Now, Captain John H. Connor's whole company faced discharge and disgrace unless the assassins were rounded up to be strung up.

A slight, soft-spoken lad of twenty-five was the first to break the silence as the Rangers gazed down at the sixth victim.

"Captain Connor!" The words poured in a torrent from the young Ranger's lips, "I've done a lot of wolf-huntin' in my time. And we aren't huntin' men now. We're huntin' wolves even if they run on two legs instead of four.

"I've found out you've got to be a wolf to catch wolves. You've got to prowl like a wolf—even if you're killin' on the law side. I'm goin' wolf-huntin'—and I'm goin' by myself."

John Connor forgot the bawling-out letter, received that morning from Governor Hardin Runnels when he looked into the unflinching eyes of the smallest man and the best shot in his company.

Ranger Goes Scouting

"If any man can track 'em down," he said, "it's Dick Preece who's got Daniel Boone's scouting blood in him. All right, Dick. I'm writing Hard Runnels I put you on the track, and for him to cool down."

Dick Preece rode into the deep woods, wolf-scoutin', after John Connor had finished his speech. Dick's daddy, Uncle Will Preece, back in Travis County, had been a scout with the Preece kinsman, Daniel Boone, and had come into the Kentucky hills from the Virginia hills with Boone. Dick Preece, born in the Kentucky hills among the related clans of the Boones, the Lincolns, and the Preeces was carrying on the tradition here in the Texas hills.

As he pushed deeper into the wilderness looking for the tracks of two-legged wolves, Ranger Dick wasn't minding what Texas was saying about him. Already they were comparing him to Sam Houston's famous scout, Deaf Smith, and saying that Dick Preece didn't need to keep dogs because he had a keener nose than any hound in the mountains. He was tired—very tired—of seeing settlers murdered because Brick Banks' gang knew it would have no hiding places, once the creek banks and the pecan thickets became corn patches and steer pastures.

Traveling on foot, because horses leave too many telltale hoofprints, he passed the limits of the white settlements on the Salt Fork of the Brazos. He kept out of the settlements themselves because he didn't want Brick Banks' spies to know he was on the trail. He expected trouble when he got beyond the fringe of the settlements. And he wasn't long finding it.

He rounded a trail skirting the edge of Pecan Bayou in Brown County. He found himself looking into the barrels of two carbines and into the hard eyes of two rough-looking hombres.

"Head back, stranger, and head quick!" one barked. "Law stops at the bayou. There ain't any land to take up here, and there ain't any uninvited company wanted."

Dick Preece's eyes were a mild blue when he answered: "I'm not lookin' for land, nor for trouble. Just lookin' for antelope."

The hombre winked at his partner. That wink meant death. And Dick Preece knew it.

The second man touched the trigger of his carbine. But before he could pull it, the gun in the hands of the slim young stranger was saying something that no outlaws ever wanted to hear. It was the death song, sung with bullets, of the Texas Rangers.

Dick Preece's bullet ripped into the desperado, killing him.

The first outlaw had fired two shots which landed harmlessly in the bark of an oak tree. When his pardner fell dead, he dodged behind the tree and began firing at Ranger Dick, who was exposed in the open.

Bullet Hits Ranger's Hat

A bullet hit the crown of Dick's sombrero and carried the hat flying away into the bayou. Another shot took away a lock of the slick black hair Dick had inherited from his part-Cherokee mother. Bullets were spattering around him. Suddenly, the Ranger tumbled to the ground.

With a gloating look in his eyes, the outlaw came from behind the tree. He smacked his lips in satisfaction as he looked down at the limp form of the

Ranger. Then he touched it carelessly with his foot.

He found the foot caught in a grip of iron. The next minute, he was writhing furiously on the ground, his arms pinioned by strong young hands, his gun lying a dozen feet away. And he shrieked when his eyes saw the look in the face of the man he thought was dead.

"Don't feel too bad, hombre," the young fellow was saying. "It's a trick that's been passed down in my family as a kind of a secret. My daddy got it from Daniel Boone and I got it from my daddy."

"Dick—Dick Preece!" the outlaw panted. "Now I know who you are." The big fellow blubbered. "I didn't have any part in killin' all those folks back there in the settlements. Don't kill me."

"I thought you were a wolf and you're nothin' but a cowardly coyote! I'm lettin' you up. But I'm holdin' my gun on you while you wade in that water and get me my hat. Then we're takin' a little trip together—you and me—to see Mr. Brick Banks."

The outlaw was shaking with fright as he waded into the water and picked up the hat. He waded out, facing Dick's gun, facing the rope because law had walked into another part of the Lone Star State when a Texas Ranger had walked in.

"Now, let's get goin', coyote," Dick growled. "Don't want to know your real name yet—this one is good enough for this trip. But you try leadin' me down a blind trail and you'll be grub for the coyotes."

Wisps of horses' hair sticking from cedar trees, a piece of a broken spur, the remains of a camp fire, told the Ranger that the scared coyote was leading him right. They traveled all day and until after sundown. The young ranger's arm became stiff and tired from holding it in a steady aim on coyote walking ahead. But not once did it relax its grip. Not once did he let the outlaw know that he was hungry and footsore and sleepy. Never let your foes see any sign of weakness—that was Dick's motto and he lived up to it.

Ranger Captures Outlaws

The stars were out when they came to the top of a little hill. Below, a fire was

burning, horses were whinnying, men were talking. Dick's keen ears caught their words in the still Texas night.

"We cleaned out the settlers," a voice was rumblin. "Tomorrow we saddle up to clean out the Rangers."

Dick turned to his prisoner. "Must be Brick Banks blowin' off. But I'm cleanin' out that whole pack. We're goin' down there. And you're going to introduce me as a pardner of yours."

A few minutes later, the big-shouldered outlaw chief and the slight young mountain man were sizing up each other in the light of the campfire.

"Name's Bob Tucker," Dick drawled. "Had a little brush with a posse over in Bosque County, then headed west to look up my old friend here." He jerked a thumb toward the man he had captured.

"You can throw in with us," Banks said. "Help yourself to grub from the skillet."

Dick moved toward the skillet. He noticed that there were three other men in camp besides himself, his prisoner, and Banks. The men were relaxed. They had stowed the guns and cartridge belts, in careless confidence, under a tree. But his own pistol was itching at its holster when he looked over the wolf pack.

He picked up the skillet. Banks' face was turned toward him.

The skillet went flying from the Ranger's hands with the speed of a bullet. The outlaw chief howled from the pain of burning grease. And as his followers leaped to their feet, Dick Preece's gun was turned on them.

"Surrender, you bunch of bushwhackers," he howled. "Surrender to the Texas Rangers!"

His eyes roved over the outlaws. How would Daniel Boone have solved this one? To capture half-a-dozen men single-handed was one thing. To bring them back under arrest, a hundred miles away, with no help, was another.

He was still wondering half-an-hour later when he heard the sound of galloping hoofs. He herded his captives into a corral. He took up a post with his gun on the corral fence, sitting there and waiting to shoot it out with more outlaws.

But the faces of the three men who rode into the outlaw camp were not wolf faces. They were the faces of comrades—Texas

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Rangers like himself.

They pulled up their horses short and whistled when they saw Dick with his man-haul. "Well, don't stand there with your eyes a-poppin'," bawled Dick Preece. "Give me a hand with these varmints."

"Figured you might need some help, Dick," a Ranger answered. "So we took out after you."

Dick "borrowed" one of the outlaw's horses for the long ride back to Jim Ned Creek. He knew that the power of these bandits in the Texas hills had been broken. Now the new counties, carved out by the Texas legislature, would be filled up with new settlers.

Only when he delivered his catch to Captain Connor did he ask Coyote's true name. It was Rance Carter. And it was as Rance Carter that the desperado swung from the gallows with Banks and the other outlaws, three months later.

"Dick," Captain Connor told him, "you've not only performed one of the greatest single-handed exploits in the whole history of the Texas Rangers, but you've saved the reputation of our company. And, now, we got another cleaning-out job to do—on Comanches."

The Comanches Are Subdued

Dick Preece knew the Comanches from their raids into the Travis County hills. He'd been in a party which trailed and slew a war band of the red trailers when he was fourteen. So Captain Connor sent him ahead of the ranger company to locate the camp of the red raiders who were terrorizing West Texas.

He rode for two days and ran into a Comanche scout. They met in a deep ravine. They eyed each other briefly for a minute. The Comanche drew a tomahawk. It flew low, close to Dick's horse. The horse reared in fright. Holding the horse's bridle with one hand, grabbing for his Colt with the other, Dick felt the sting of an arrow across his cheek. But the next minute that Comanche lay dying in a patch of ferns. The Ranger's bullet had hit him between the eyes.

A mile away, he sighted the Comanche encampment on a little knoll. He rode swiftly back to the Ranger camp. That night, the Texans struck.

They rode like demons into the sleeping Comanche camp. Dick's singing lead took care of two sentries whose throats were rattling with death before they could give the alarm. The Texans knocked down wigwams and shot surprised warriors jumping to their feet. They captured the chief and bound him with lassos. Then in the woods, Dick heard a child crying. He galloped toward the sound.

A Comanche baby was crawling around the body of its dead mother. An arrow was bedded deep in the woman's chest. She'd been accidentally killed by one of her own people during the battle.

Dick picked up the baby. He placed it on his saddle and held it with one arm. The infant stopped yowling and cuddled up to him. He was grinning sheepishly as he placed it beside him on his blankets, that night.

"This here's my prisoner," he told his comrades. "He's the chummiest little prisoner any Ranger ever caught."

He headed toward his own hills in Travis County with it. Pioneer women gave him milk and diapers along the way. When he hit Travis County, he rode to the camp of the Tonkawa Indians, firm allies of the settlers and bitter enemies of the Comanches.

He roused up the Tonkawa chief known as Jim White. "Jim, do you want to see one good Comanche?" he asked.

The chief scowled at the baby. "Tonks no wants see Comanches—big or little. Dick Preece great warrior. But Dick Preece no make Tonks take Comanche papoose."

"Jim," answered Dick Preece. "You're going to raise this Comanche young 'un. You're going to raise him never to know he's a Comanche. I'll be back every so often to see how you raise him."

The Ranger was faithful to his word. The little Comanche grew up an adopted Tonkawa, never knowing he wasn't a real one. When the Tonkawas moved from Texas to Indian Territory, he went with them.

Dick Preece had been furloughed to find a home for the Indian babe. When he rode down to Austin to report for duty, he got a shock. The legislature had failed to appropriate money for more than a skeleton force of rangers. Certain com-

panies had been abolished altogether, and Captain Connor's was one of them.

With a heavy heart, Dick Preece turned in his ranger star. He put away his citations for bravery. He thought he was through following a flag and a gun after those two years of hard riding and hard shooting. And Uncle Will Preece needed him to run their ranch on Bull Creek.

But a far-away kinsman of his was deciding differently for him.

That kinsman was his third cousin, Abe Lincoln. Cousin Abe became president in 1861, and Texas seceded from the Union. But Bull Creek seceded from the Confederacy. Ex-Ranger Richard Lincoln Preece was the one who raised the flag of the Union under the very shadow of the Confederate state capitol.

A Guerilla Outfit

He rounded up other Kentucky and Tennessee hillmen who had drifted down with the Preeses to the Texas hills. He helped organize that first outfit of Southern Union guerillas—the Texas Mountain Eagles. He refused to be more than a non-com in the outfit, but he was automatically its chief scout. He spotted the Confederate recruiting detachments moving into the hills. Time after time those detachments were hurled back by the Mountain Eagles, swarming out in furious surprise attacks from the canyons and cedar brakes.

Other ex-rangers rode and shot for the Union with Dick Preece. For the rangers split during the Civil War—some to ride with the Blue, some to ride with the Gray. Those who wore the Blue dreamed with Dick Preece of capturing the Confederate capital in Austin, a tantalizing ten miles from Bull Creek, and of seizing the state government and bringing Texas back into the Union.

The Confederate government in Richmond got wind of the plan. It rushed a crack division under General E. Kirby Smith to put down the Unionists of West Texas. Too smart to engage these well-armed gray clad soldiers in open battle, the poorly-armed Mountain Eagles made a masterly retreat over seven hundred miles of mountain and cactus to the Mexican border. Then they sailed to New Orleans, held by the Union forces.

There General N. P. Banks swore them in as the First Texas Cavalry of the U. S. Army. Afterwards, Abe Lincoln turned his kinsman, Dick Preece, and the other Union Texans loose against the Confederate Texans in the crucial battle for Northern Louisiana. Texan shot at Texan in the bloodiest battles ever waged between Texans—with one bunch carrying the Lone Star Flag side by side with the Stars and Stripes and the other carrying it side by side with the Stars and Bars. But each side made it a point to bury dead enemy Texans, found on the battlefield, under the Lone Star flag.

"You'd think it was a private war between Texans," grumbled General Banks. "Texas shot its way out of Mexico, then shot its way out of the United States. Whichever way Texas turns, there'll be shooting."

Dick Preece was with the Texan Unionists when they pushed the Confederate Texans across the Sabine River. Then both sides were on their home ground of Texas. By that time, he was rated as one of the crack shots of the Union Army as he had been one of the crack shots of the Texas Rangers. He had no buttons for his ragged blue coat. But he had fifteen sharpshooter medals to pin it up.

It was a hot day in 1863 when he and a Confederate Texans drew a bead on each other in Panola County, Texas, just over the Sabine from Louisiana. The two spotted each other from opposite bluffs overlooking a dim country road. It looked like a double killing as each took careful aim.

All Texan!

Just then, a little girl came skipping down the road. Each Texan quickly put down his gun. When she'd passed on, the man in gray called out to the man in blue.

"That kid's daddy is wearin' your color. Her uncle is wearin' mine. What does that make her?"

"Makes her all Texan," yelled back Dick Preece. "Let's drop guns and say howdy."

They met in the middle of the road and smoked a pipe together. The man in gray said his name was Morris Moore.

As they rode through the South, the Texans in blue were joined by other

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Dixie Unionists. In Arkansas, they picked up a Missouri Irishman named Mark Shannon. One night around the campfire, Sergeant Shannon showed Sergeant Preece a picture of his pretty sister.

"Her name's Kate," Mark said. "She cussed out Quantrell right to his face once when he came raidin' near a house where she was visitin'."

Dick looked for a long time at the picture of that dashing Irish girl who'd dared the fierce Confederate guerilla chief to tear down the Union flag flying from that house. For good measure, Mark added, she'd told off a couple of hard-shooting young fellows who rode with Quantrell. The pair called themselves Frank and Jesse James.

"Awful pretty girl, Mark," Dick sighed as he handed back the picture. "I'd sure like to meet her when this is all over."

"Blast your hide, Dick, why don't you drop her a line? She'd be right proud to hear from a cousin of Old Abe."

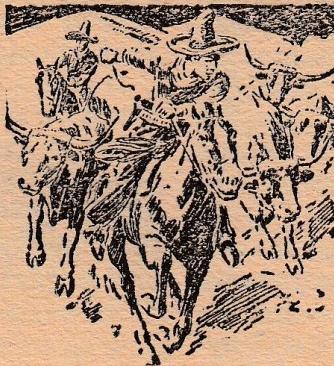
The Gray yielded to the Blue. The Shannons, perked up by Dick's bragging letters about Texas, moved to the Lone Star State. Dick met the pretty Irish girl.

She became his wife. And they became my grandparents.

Right after his marriage, Dick found out he had a new neighbor. The neighbor was Morris Moore who'd bought a ranch nearby. The two had a good laugh over what had happened back there on that road. Later, Morris Moore became a ranger lieutenant. Afterwards he was a Travis County deputy sheriff who got badly wounded in the great battle with Sam Bass' gang at Round Rock.

Dick Preece raised twelve children, and a thousand times that many steers and horses. He kept open house for every man—ex-partisan of Abe Lincoln or ex-soldier of Jeff Davis—who knocked on his door. When he was on his dying bed in 1906, an old neighbor who had worn the Gray nursed him through his last hours.

"Dick Preece fought on a different side from most of us," said Governor Sam Lanham, an ex-Confederate soldier, after the old fighter had passed on. "But he was one of Texas' great scouts and one of its great rangers. I reckon Uncle Dick stretched the Boone Trail clear to Texas."



"You Can't Buck the Lobo Legion!"

SHERIFF Buck Drago of Wagontrack looked at Jim Hatfield keenly and asked: "Where'd you leave your Ranger company, Jim?"

Hatfield glanced up, a humorous twinkle in his eye. "What company?"

Drago's jaw dropped. "You mean you came up here *alone!* Dang it, I asked for a whole company! You buck the Lobo Legion alone, Jim, and you're committin' suicide!"

But Hatfield took the chance—in THE LOBO LEGION, by Jackson Cole—and met a thunderous challenge with the lightning of his six-guns! Follow Hatfield as he combats marauding killers who imperil the great herds of Texas—in THE LOBO LEGION, a smashing novel of roaring guns, range war and rustlers! It's in the next issue—look forward to it!